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## De Paradijsmethode

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## SUMMARY

Why and how a number of Dutch landscape architects wanted to modernise the landscape in the 1960s and 1970s is the question that is answered in the three chapters of this thesis. The first discusses the mission of these landscape architects, which was formed in the context of Dutch urbanisation processes and spatial planning policy. The second focuses at how landscape architects thought about the need for changes in their professional status and in the design process in order to realise this mission. The alterations to the design process had consequences for the function and image of design, as is discussed in chapter three.

In the 1960s a number of Dutch landscape architects felt a strong necessity to modernise the landscape. Their opinion was that the landscape was worn out and did not live up to contemporary demands any more. Because of the gap between fast changing social and technological processes and the slow pace of physical transformations in the landscape they called this a *time-lag*. The introduction and institutionalisation of Dutch national planning and a growing political and social attention for landscape and environment seemed to provide optimal conditions to bridge that gap.

Modernising the landscape meant preparing it for contemporary and future use, while respecting its ecological and historical conditions, thus creating a 'human habitat'. The existing landscape should be the base and reference for any transformation. The careful consideration of renewal should be the alternative for uncritical surrender to the newest technology or anxiously holding on to the past. This required careful observation of the physical landscape instead of projecting ideal images onto it about rural qualities or nature. The landscape was considered as a coherent whole, consisting of urban, rural and natural components which were valued equally.

To be able to take care of the landscape in the way they wanted landscape architects felt the need to improve their professional conditions and to make adaptations to the design process. The professional requirements were to operate more scientifically, have a coordinative position in spatial planning and work in multidisciplinary teams. This ambition implied a removal from the traditional, creative and intuitive working methods of previous generations. The landscape architect also became a planner, advisor, supervisor and policy maker. Although this broadening of the profession was considered necessary the new tasks were also seen as a distraction from what landscape architects thought of as the core activity of the discipline: design.

The modernisation of the landscape was not strived for collectively or institutionally. Communication and information happened mostly orally and was not organised structurally. It was of a personal character and occurred when the occasion arose, for example during seminars, excursions or workshops. The incoherency of the profession was strengthened by the aim for multidisciplinary

cooperation with architects, urban planners, ecologists, civil engineers, sociologists and planners. Landscape architects aimed at a coordinating position in the cooperative process, because it fitted their ideal of merging all relevant information into a synthetic landscape design. The disciplines that they worked with were colleagues and competitors at the same time and it was hard for landscape architects to get the position they wanted. They stressed their secondary role by complaining their image expressed in nicknames like 'beautification boys' or 'child wife of spatial planning'. What they wanted was a more scientific approach by assigning an important role to survey and analysis, changing the relationship between research and design. A thorough knowledge of the qualities and operating processes of landscapes was considered indispensable for the creation of a modern landscape that had to be coherent, differentiated and flexible. The existing landscape had to be taken as a frame of reference, its physical, ecological, historical and aesthetic properties determining the possibilities and limitations of any interventions. Ideally a survey would be executed by a multidisciplinary team of specialists, coordinated by a landscape architect and tested by the users of the future landscape. Because of the complexity and idealism of this design process, critics called this a 'paradise method'. Despite the aspiration for a more scientific design process, landscape architects did not want to be scientists themselves. They wanted to apply scientific knowledge and working methods in their design practice. Landscape analysis was executed by gathering and processing knowledge from other disciplines, like ecology, hydrology, sociology and (perception) psychology, supplemented with their own research and observation of the landscape on site.

The belief in design as synthetic and creative activity as the core business of landscape architecture inhibited the development of a scientific design process and the paradise method to succeed. At the end of the 1970s this idea was supported by the conclusion that the accumulation of knowledge had stimulated conservative ideas about the landscape. It had not resulted in the integration of renewal and preservation in spatial policy and design, but it had strengthened their opposition.

This dilemma also occurred in ideas about the form a modernised landscape should have. According to the paradise method form should fit the contemporary landscape. Form had to be purposeful and meaningful. It had to demonstrate a visible connection between the existing landscape and its new functions and make the users feel home in their landscapes.

Stressing the importance of research for a better understanding of the existing landscape, caused some landscape architects to warn against it and also pay attention to design. Their opinion was that although a design should create fitting forms, it also should make human interventions visible and express the contemporary character of the landscape.

Contemporary life had to be recognisable as such, but still have a relationship with the existing landscape. Therefore the questions about form were which interventions should be made visible and which not and what forms should be used for their design. To let only new technologies determine the look of new landscapes was considered as an impoverishment, but so was the use of historical forms as well. For that would be a denial of contemporary life. Both options lacked a connection to the existing landscape.

Another design dilemma was the use of natural and cultural forms. Natural forms were judged positively, because they expressed the ecological functions and character of the landscape. On the other hand, they were rejected for being used to hide contemporary interventions. A positive judgement of cultural, mostly geometrical, forms implied that they were applied in a modern, progressive way, expressing human presence in the landscape. On the other hand, these forms also showed human destruction instead of civilisation; the domination over nature and a lack of historical awareness. These dilemma's were too fundamental to be solved permanently, as was the question about the relation between research and design. At the end of the 1970s design regained its former status as the main activity of landscape architects, although the survey did not disappear. And because of that, neither did the paradise method. Landscape architects held on to their idea of a modernised landscape, consisting of city and countryside, ecology and technology and nature and culture as its integral parts.